

ANNA CZEPIEL

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY IN KRAKÓW  
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY  
INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY  
E-MAIL: ANNAPATRYCJA.CZEPIEL@GMAIL.COM

---

## **“Helios rückt die Träume aus dem Nachlass”: Romantic Imagination and Dream Life in Hannah Arendt’s Thought**

### ABSTRACT

The article aims at presenting Hannah Arendt’s complicated relation with romanticism and romantic imagination and pays particular attention to dream life. It discovers that the theme of dreams-that-turn-out-to-be-real-life mysteriously appears throughout Arendt’s works. The primary source of this theme would be a self-reflective essay *Die Schatten* written in 1925 by 19-year-old Arendt, in which she admits that in dreams she lives “her proper life” (*ihr eigentliches Leben*) and feels internal harmony as well as harmony with the world. Interestingly, the essay ends with a wish to have, in the real life, scope for free verbal expression that would enable her to “release her soul,” thus to dwell in a real, non-perfect version of dreamlike harmony. This source—as well as other texts, including the book on Rahel Varnhagen and unknown youthful notes on Sophocles—allows me to find out that it is both tempting and justified to describe Arendt’s mature concept of political realm as a realm where the involuntary features of dreams, namely the perfect expression of uniqueness of the individual as well as his or her internal harmony and harmony with the world, are to some extent recaptured.

### KEYWORDS

Hannah Arendt, Dream Life, Romantic Imagination

## Introductory Remarks about Arendt and Romantic Imagination

The role of romantic imagination in Hannah Arendt's thought is a rich yet unexplored subject. Before seeking romantic imagination in Arendt's thought, it is important to point out the fragments where Arendt seems to explicitly stand against romantic sensibility. Firstly, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* there are two pages where Arendt ironises the romantic "unlimited idolization of the 'personality' of the individual, whose very arbitrariness became the proof of genius."<sup>1</sup> Of course we have to remember that in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt's critique of romanticism, despite having something in common with the critique of free emotional expression, is mainly against "race-thinking" that arises from the concept of "innate personality," which is, according to Arendt, dependent only on being born and not on thoughts and deeds—a concept that I think is kind of corruption of romanticism and does not manifest true romantic individualism. Secondly, Arendt criticizes romantic approach in her essay *Civil Disobedience*. In her opinion, since politics is (only) about saving the public space and not about Thoreau-like postulate of harmonisation between individual purposes and politics, the rule of personal feelings should be of a minor role. For Arendt—at least in her essay on civil disobedience—emotional, spiritual and economic will to uphold values such as "justice" leads to "fanaticism."<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, it is incontestable that at a more general level, Hannah Arendt was a thinker of romantic imagination. Although Arendt understands imagination primarily in Kantian terms<sup>3</sup>—as a tool for "representing what is absent" so that one can guess causes and consequences of some political events or objectify his or her subjective feelings in order to make them understandable for the largest possible number of people—this kind of appreciation of imagination, along with Arendt's emphasis on pluralistic diversity of citizens' opinions, also opens the door to the romantic imagination of an individual, imagination where personal experiences and feelings are a help in reasoning (and I suspect that this is why Arendt's concept of plurality is not welcomed by

<sup>1</sup> H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Orlando–New York 1979, pp. 165–170.

<sup>2</sup> Eadem, *Civil Disobedience*, [in:] eadem, *Crises of the Republic*, San Diego–New York–London 1972, pp. 61–67.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. eadem, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press 1992; W. Heuer, 'Imagination Is the Prerequisite of Understanding' (Arendt). *The Bridge Between Thinking and Judging*, [in:] *Hannah Arendt: Filosofia e Totalitarismo*, eds. F. Fiscetti and F. R. Recchia Luciani, Genoa 2007, [online] [http://www.wolfgang-heuer.com/wp-content/uploads/heuer\\_wolfgang\\_imagination\\_bari.pdf](http://www.wolfgang-heuer.com/wp-content/uploads/heuer_wolfgang_imagination_bari.pdf) [accessed: 15.06.2019].

some conservative-Hegelian thinkers<sup>4</sup> who fear that in this kind of politics an individual would "drink too deeply of the strong wine of freedom;"<sup>5</sup> but this is also true that mainstream liberals who are accustomed to political polarisation, despite seeming to be diversity-friendly, also oppose the diversity that surpasses the polarisation<sup>6</sup>). In other words, the strict division of world-views that is characteristic of modern party politics does not encompass the infinity of possible opinions—the infinity that Arendt praises by placing emphasis on spontaneity and unpredictability of speech understood as political action—and for this reason a person having his or her individual set of opinions, using his or her romantic imagination, is welcomed. As Arendt claims in *On Revolution*, "Public opinion, by virtue of its unanimity, provokes a unanimous opposition and thus kills true opinions everywhere."<sup>7</sup> This general premise of Arendt's thinking is more important than her several ironic commentaries about romanticism and her claim to divide the private realm from the political realm.

Precisely speaking, Arendt's concept of politics, despite downgrading personal romantic motivations in her radical essay *Civil Disobedience*, consists primarily in undoubtedly romantic idea of manifesting one's "uniqueness" in public action.<sup>8</sup> In *The Human Condition* the thinker claims that an individual who acts in the public realm discloses more than mere rational meaning of his or her words: an acting person shows "the daimon who accompanies each man throughout life."<sup>9</sup> Arendt, using the quote from Karen Blixen: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them,"<sup>10</sup> claims that through public action an individual "tells her story," which means that a personal point of view, imagination and experience are present as well as so-called "rational arguments." For Arendt, the action—perhaps not only po-

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Z. Stawrowski, *Solidarność znaczy więź (Solidarity Means a Bond)*, Kraków 2010, pp. 99–102.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. B. Jowett, Rockville 2018, p. 410.

<sup>6</sup> An exact example from Poland is the critique of so-called "symmetry thinking," namely, having one's own set of opinions which surpasses political battle between leftist-liberal opposition and conservative-traditionalist government. In one of articles, liberal journalists directly criticized „individualism of thinking”: M. Janicki, W. Władyka, *Kłątwa politycznego symetryzmu (The Fate of Political Symmetry Thinking)*, "Polityka", 03.05.2016. I am aware of quoting a press article instead of a philosophical work; however, I am sure that the critique of individualist, independent thinking has a deeper philosophical dimension and might bring severe consequences.

<sup>7</sup> H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, London 1990, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 2019, p. 176.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 175.

litical—is possible only if we “imagine that things might as well be different from what they actually are:”<sup>11</sup> the effects of this imagination and hope, the two romantic concepts, are directly and indirectly disclosed by the acting person. Of course, in *The Human Condition* the philosopher does not identify the acting citizen with the storyteller: the storyteller is rather a historian who describes political events from a distanced perspective—Arendt writes that “action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants.”<sup>12</sup> But even acknowledging this view, we must admit that Arendt’s vision of the “revelatory character of action and speech”<sup>13</sup> is about storytelling being done by the acting individual herself. Even if the actor, as Arendt strangely claims, does not know what exactly he reveals, he feels the “urge of self-disclosure,”<sup>14</sup> which clearly means to me the desire to tell something. Of course, this kind of storytelling is actor’s “talking about himself/herself,” which mixes subjective and objective elements and romantically makes the subjectivity a window through which we see objectivity, while the historian wants to tell the story as scientifically and objectively as possible, and to take all possible data into consideration. My task is not to answer which way of storytelling is better—I just want to accentuate that political action was for Arendt a kind of storytelling done by an acting citizen. Arendt makes it clear in her later work, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, when she claims that “spectator sits in every actor”<sup>15</sup> because the acting person’s capacity to judge makes himself “understood”<sup>16</sup> by others. In other words, the actor-spectator “creates”<sup>17</sup> the public realm by his or her storytelling.

Although Arendt says that public action is “distinguished from mere bodily existence,” I think that this is her affirmation of the—as she herself wrote—“individualist”<sup>18</sup> willpower to disclose the self and gain fame outside home rather than the conservative abandonment of so-called “sinful sensitive needs” for the sake of “common good” that provokes her to say that the public “appearance [...] is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human.”<sup>19</sup> Another example of Arendt’s romanticism seems to be the fact that

<sup>11</sup> Eadem, *Lying in Politics*, [in] eadem, *Crises of the Republic*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Eadem, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 176. I think the very concept of politics as disclosing person’s uniqueness is the way to overcome Arendt’s sharp “conservative” distinction between the private need of

the philosopher also used to illustrate political and philosophical phenomena with pieces of poetry, as if they were equally important as academic works, and even more revealing than the latter. In *The Human Condition* the philosopher quotes Rilke's poems: the first of them is about pain and the second one about art.<sup>20</sup> The book *On Revolution* ends with Sophocles's words: "Not to be born prevails over all meaning uttered in words; by far the second-best for life, once it has appeared, is to go as swiftly as possible whence it came."<sup>21</sup> This is the same book where Arendt romantically claimed that "opposition between passion and reason is not enlightening."<sup>22</sup> Finally, at the very end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt seems to defend romantic imagination, understood as the idea that individual's interpretation of reality that affirms the hopes of an individual is demonstration of truth, while the process of defeating good interpretations, "always reducing one thing from the other and thinking everything to the worst" is against the truth and is pre-totalitarian.<sup>23</sup> A good example of this romantic affirmation of individual hopes appears in part IV of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, where Gustaw—a young man who is unhappily in love—does not succumb to a priest's suggestion that he does not know The Holy Bible. Then in line with his spiritual experience, Gustaw develops his own theology of love between a man and a woman. He claims that even before the birth of specific people, God chooses a man and a woman to be together forever—and following this kind of love cannot be a sin.

### **Dreaming as Perfect Harmony, Political Participation as Non-perfect Harmony?**

When I speak about romantic imagination, I also mean the phenomenon of treating dreams as an important part of individual's life. In *The Age of Romanticism* Joanne Schneider observes: "Romantic artists [...] were obsessed with dreams and their insights about the past and future. Many Romantics felt that while dreaming, the individual could return to mankind's lost unity."<sup>24</sup> Schneider gives here an example of the theme of dreaming in John Keats's poem

---

well-being and the political world: according to Arendt economic needs make people similar and it results in the transformation of creative citizens into passive voters; however, in the democratic participation the economic experience can be part of uniqueness of an acting person.

<sup>20</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., pp. 51 and 168.

<sup>21</sup> Eadem, *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 225.

<sup>23</sup> Eadem, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., pp. 477–478.

<sup>24</sup> J. Schneider, *The Age of Romanticism*, Westport–London 2007, p. 44.

“Endymion,”<sup>25</sup> where we can read that after his journey the poet “sang the story up into the air, / giving it universal freedom,” but even earlier “the forest told it in a dream / to a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam / a poet caught as he was journeying.”<sup>26</sup> Speaking out one’s own story and giving it worldly-political “freedom” to be preserved (a theme which is important for Arendt) is anticipated by dreaming about the forests and lakes (and presumably strange creatures such as common goldeneyes), which tell this story each other and discuss it. The importance of dreams occurs also in Mickiewicz’s prologue to part III of *Forefathers’ Eve*, when a dream is presented as a place where a dreaming individual can hear messages from God, angels and heavenly souls. In Mickiewicz’s play, the angel tells Gustaw that it was somehow interplaying with Gustaw in his dreams so that good thoughts and good scenarios could be found during the dream: “Through the night I stood attending / To the passions of your dream / Like a lily pale and bending / O’er a muddied, rushing stream. / Often did that evil press / Give my spirit sick offense, / Yet I sought, though it were weak, / Just one gleam of righteousness.”<sup>27</sup> According to these words—even if we treat the transcendent element as a metaphor and not as a sign from God—in dreams an individual gets inspiration for acting in the waking world, and is informed about his or her strengths. Hope is understood as the search for “just one gleam of righteousness” in me and in others, the search that is open to the unknown, to the spontaneous (instead of the conservative “hope to defeat individualists and subjectivists,” a hope expressed e. g. by Chantal Delsol and Polish intellectual group “Political Theology,” where romantic concept of hope gets corrupted). Hope, understood as romantic “searching for just one gleam of righteousness” in the individual’s situation, cannot only be a good description of Arendt’s defence of romantic imagination and the concept of *initium* and of manifestation of uniqueness, expressed in some parts of *The Human Condition* as well as in the final paragraphs of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (the paragraphs against the “ice-cold reasoning” like Hegel’s postulates; one of these postulates, I think, is “destroying the particularity,” especially the particularity of the one who is “an innocent flower,”<sup>28</sup> namely, the one who is a romantic individualist who wants to have a bit of consolation in his or her hope).

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> J. Keats, *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*, London 1818, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve*, trans. G. R. Noyes, [in:] *Polish Romantic Drama*, ed. H. B. Segel, Amsterdam 1997, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1984, p. 89.

The “search of righteousness” in a person’s history and meandering thoughts, as well as the related phenomenon of uniqueness of a person, can also be manifested in Arendt’s affirmation of dream life, starting from her description of dreaming as internal harmony in April 1925 in her self-reflexive essay *Die Schatten*. Later the theme, which I define as dreams-that-turn-out-to-be-real-life, was mysteriously returning in Hannah Arendt’s thought. In *The Human Condition* Arendt observes that “even dreams are real, since they presuppose a dreamer and a dream”<sup>29</sup> and it seems that her observation is something more than part of the irony of Cartesian thinking. In *The Life of the Mind* the thinker tells two stories about suspicion that dreams are our true life: firstly, she reflects upon the philosopher Chuang Chou who “once dreamt he was a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased” but who after awakening “didn’t know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming it was Chuang Chou.”<sup>30</sup> Secondly, referring to Blaise Pascal, Arendt observes that the Cartesian mode of “certainty of I-am” “would hardly be sufficient to distinguish between dream and reality: a poor artisan dreaming for twelve hours every night that he was a king would have the same life (and enjoy the same amount of ‘happiness’) as a king who dreamed every night that he was nothing but a poor artisan. Moreover, since ‘one frequently dreams that he is dreaming,’ nothing can guarantee that what we call our life is not wholly a dream from which we shall awaken in death.”<sup>31</sup>

In *Die Schatten* young Arendt clearly describes dream life as the place of internal harmony, even as the “proper life” (*das eigentliche Leben*), which disappears while she is awakening. As Arendt wrote about herself in 1925:

Every time she woke up from that long, dreamy and yet deep sleep, in which one merges entirely with what one dreams, she felt the same shy, hesitant tenderness toward the things of the world, which made clear to her how much of her proper life [ihres eigentlichen Lebens] had sunken completely into itself—like sleep, one might say, if there can be anything comparable to it in normal life—and how much had run its course.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>30</sup> H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego-New York-London 1981, p. 198.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 150.

<sup>32</sup> H. Arendt, M. Heidegger, *Letters 1925–1975*, trans. A. Shields, Harcourt, London 2004. Quoted from Martin Travers’s biography of Heidegger: <https://martinheideggerbiography.com/biographies-1916-1923/> [accessed: 7.07.2019]. I changed the words “her actual life” to “her proper life” because I think the changed version corresponds better with the German original by Arendt: H. Arendt, M. Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse*, ed. U. Ludz, Frankfurt am Main 2013, pp. 21–25.

According to this view, the events which occur in dreams, together with actions of a dreaming person, are—contrary to the waking life—fully encompassing the individuality of a dreaming person and, moreover, clarifying the person's observations concerning the world. Let us compare the beginning of *Die Schatten* with its end, where the young philosopher expresses her specific wish: "Perhaps her soul will realise what it is to speak out and to be released under a different sky." It is clear that she wants, to the possible extent, the internal harmony and the harmony with the world, experienced in dreams and described at the beginning of her essay, to be recaptured in real life. Young Arendt suggests that in real life, the possibility of this harmony slips away, and that this situation needs to be changed. The wish of young Arendt is the following: she wants to have a "different sky," free space where she, and of course other people as well, will have an opportunity to "speak out." What a discovery, if we look at these words from the perspective of Arendt's later political thought! The phenomenon of "speaking out" as the manifestation of freedom and personal uniqueness is what would later be Arendt's theoretical-political postulate.<sup>33</sup> Although Arendt got directly interested in meta-political freedom in a turbulent era of the 1930s and 1940s, we can suppose that a specific vision of (and yearning for) essential features of that freedom, though not called "political," were present in her mind while calligraphing *Die Schatten* in April 1925 at the desk in Königsberg; all the more so in the winter 1925–1926 when she wrote a poem "An die Freunde" ("To Friends") where the theme of not having a homeland appears. In the poem she admits that she stares with "a glance of the one who does not have the homeland"—"der Blick des Heimatlosen."<sup>34</sup> Given that mature Arendt would claim that an individual's self-disclosure in politics was freedom in general, we might suppose that in her youth Arendt held a vague vision of freedom as self-disclosure, though in her Marburg or Heidelberg years she was not connecting it directly with political life.

Following young Arendt's definition of dreams as the realm where one lives a "proper life" and "merges entirely with what one dreams"—thus where one has a deep understanding of the world—I can say that mature Arendt's vision that human freedom fulfils mainly by speaking out our uniqueness and our

---

<sup>33</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 176: "Through speech and action, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct. [...] With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth"; eadem, *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 130: "Tyranny, in other words, deprived of public happiness, though not necessarily of private well-being, while the republic granted to every citizen the right to be 'a participator in the government affairs,' the right to be seen in action".

<sup>34</sup> As quoted in: E. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*, New Haven–London 2004, p. 484.



specific understanding of the world,<sup>35</sup> is comparable to the way we tend to act in dreams. Namely, in dreams our words and deeds, though often "irrational" in terms of waking life, often involuntarily underline what is most important for us and for people we encounter as well as integrate different spheres of our life. In other words, strange things we do in dreams "are" our uniqueness, our story; dreams capture our uniqueness to the extent that is impossible in reality. The fact that in dreams this perfect storytelling and uniqueness are expressed involuntarily, makes Arendt's concept of political action even more corresponding with the realm of dream, and proves even more that coming closer to dreamlike reality is a model of politics in Arendt's thought. It is because when Arendt describes—and praises—self-disclosing in political action and the individual's "urge toward self-disclosure,"<sup>36</sup> she also strangely writes that "unpredictability of outcome is closely related to the revelatory character of action and speech, in which one discloses one's self without ever either knowing himself or being able to calculate beforehand whom he reveals."<sup>37</sup> In politics, we should speak consciously our views, but at the same time try to attain the same involuntary, symbolic level of disclosure and integration of our personal life experience, wishes and self-decidedness as we see in our dreams.

Although the words "dream" or "der Traum" used by Arendt in *Die Schatten* might also mean conscious phantasies, the context—namely, the fragment about waking from the sleep—suggests that "dream" means primarily things seen while sleeping. Nonetheless, her youthful essay *Die Schatten* as well as the philosopher's lifelong devotion to poetry undoubtedly show that not only a night dream as a harmonious disclosure of human questions, but also some form of daydreaming were important for Arendt and might have influenced her vision of politics as a demonstration of, I may say, objectified subjectivity, consisting in "being seen and being heard by others [that] derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position."<sup>38</sup> In the context of links between dreams, daydreaming and self-disclosure, it is interesting that in *Die Schatten* Arendt admits that in her search for answers to existential questions, she went "in some way above what is private and intimate in order to bring closer what is human" ("gewissermaßen über das Private und Intime hinaus menschlich näher zu bringen"<sup>39</sup>).

---

<sup>35</sup> This subjectivism is in line with Arendt's criticism of mass society in which only one viewing perspective is allowed: "The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective" (H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 58).

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 192.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 57.

<sup>39</sup> H. Arendt, M. Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975...*, op. cit., p. 24.

I can sum up Arendt's vision of action in three elements. The political actor is (1) directly speaking out his views on current public problems through his individualistic will to gain "fame" and to make his name "known,"<sup>40</sup> (2) communicating his private views and feelings through making it understandable to others thus making possible the views mentioned in element (1),<sup>41</sup> (3) indirectly and involuntarily disclosing his personal history, emotions and experience—the thing Arendt calls "daimon." These three elements sum up into a story told by the political actor, and second and third view has, in its ideal form, something to do with symbolism experienced in a dream, where even political and theoretical problems tend to be expressed better.

Of course, contrary to strong connotations about dreaming, when I talk about "strange things" we do in dreams, I do not mean erotic themes of some dreams, but rather dreams like the one dreamt by Rahel Varnhagen, as it is evoked by Arendt in her book about Varnhagen: "[Rahel] found herself in a splendid, inhabited palace, [but] despite the fact the doors were open, [...] she was never able to join the people," instead, in the dream Rahel "was everytime six or eight rooms away" and found there a strange animal.<sup>42</sup> In Rahel's another dream, she and one of her female friends were seeing Mother of God (Mary), but "could not see her distinctly," because, despite being in the room, the saint was covered by some kind of clouds. Rahel and her friend asked themselves and the saint existential questions. "The Mother of God [...] only said Yes! to each question," for example "do you know the suffering of love?"—recollected Rahel, as quoted by Arendt. At the end of this interrogation, Rahel—of course in her dream—was crying and screaming: "I have not done anything! [...] "I am innocent!"<sup>43</sup>

The homely ideal of public space, understood as inspired by the idea of recapturing dream life might raise questions about nightmares. I am aware that dreams can also display injustice, aggression and wars. When I evoke Arendt's words of "merging with things that we dream," I do not mean understanding of "dream" as "paradise." I rather mean a dreamy state of the world in which our actions and words, as well as actions of other people, limitlessly demonstrate our uniqueness, and, sometimes exaggerate while reflecting one's conscious interpretation of reality, make us aware of the true bad or good nature of real situations. Sometimes symbolic situations displayed in dreams inform us what

---

<sup>40</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., pp. 181 and 193.

<sup>41</sup> Eadem, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 72–77.

<sup>42</sup> Eadem, *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewish Woman*, New York–London 1974, pp. 134–145.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, pp. 141–142.

could be done in a specific situation in real life, and how my behaviour affects others, and in which light I can reflect upon reality and relations between people. Based on Varnhagen's dream life, Arendt commented that dreams have "the explicitness and clarity of a world which was not provided for in the day."<sup>44</sup> Dreamy harmony consists thus, as I tried to show above, not—or maybe not always—in a paradise, but in a better clarity and sharpness of the world, and, paradoxically, as Arendt argued in her book on Rahel, dreamy harmony consists in more possibilities and more sense-making of our acting in the world. The dreams of Rahel Varnhagen, of which examples were described above, are the allegory of identity-seeking, both in personal and public-political terms, or rather are good example of unification of these two realms: Varnhagen as a creator and host of a Romantic literary salon and as a person who, for Arendt mainly as a Jewish woman, wants to find her identity within her society as well as to ask and answer questions about assimilation.

Of course 19-year-old Arendt had not yet been a political philosopher, but it might be true that the wish from the ending of *Die Schatten* reflects vaguely her later postulate of creating a public realm which would be a realm of homeliness for all, where each citizen could disclose his or her uniqueness and feel a sense of community, and from which—contrary to social realm, where, according to Arendt's reasonable diagnosis, we tend to "discriminate" persons with whom we do not want to spend time—no one could be thrown away. The wish to have home in the political realm arose both from Arendt's personal feeling of estrangement, linked to her psychological characteristics<sup>45</sup> and from political unhomeliness such as the experience of war, antisemitism, and being a refugee in France and the United States. The line from Arendt's poem written in 1946, which encompasses this difficult experience, confirms that craving for the political realm of free participation is somehow the wish to evoke the ideal that dwells in a dream world: "Lucky is he who has no home: he sees it still in his dreams."<sup>46</sup> (As for Arendt the Greek political participation was an ideal

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 137.

<sup>45</sup> Elisabeth Young-Bruehl writes about Hannah Arendt's school years in Königsberg: "While schoolmates visited and chatted during school recesses and over lunch, she marched around the schoolyard, hands clasped behind her back, braids bouncing, lost in solitary thought" (E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 33). I think this description is very suggestive. Hannah's willingness to spend time alone could have arisen from the fact that she could have found teenagers' chatting stupid, or from the fact the schoolmates might have not accepted her, or perhaps from the fact that she might have had some problems which needed to be resolved in the process of solitary thinking. Of course, maybe all these three interpretations are to some extent true.

<sup>46</sup> As quoted in: ibidem, p. 188.

of politics, we can half-jokingly say that one of Rahel's dreams she evokes—the dream where “people were all dressed like Athenians”<sup>47</sup>—proves that Arendtian vision of politics, based on plurality and complex internal richness of each person, would be fulfilled in treating the political realm as the one recapturing the condition from a dream.)

There are uncountable cases where our dreams can reveal a link between political situation, social conditions and personal feelings (as Arendt would say, this results from human plurality and capacity to think and act). The theme of this article allows me, as I hope, to evoke two examples in the form of my own dreams. I had these dreams and wrote them down almost a decade ago, and what is interesting, while dreaming I met Józef Piłsudski—a Polish national hero, who was one of the creators of Polish independence in 1918. This kind of “meeting” informs us about another political function of dreams: in dreams we have an ability to reflect a political situation together with the great heroes of our history, and these encounters and mere presence of these people in our dreams is an element which bonds a political community—of course, only when we tell each other our dreams. This way of celebrating our bonds with political community can surpass the thoughtless, simplifying and anti-individualistic phenomenon of political polarisation that occurs in some countries.

In my dream from 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010, I was sitting outside on stairs in a typical Polish backyard. I think it was somewhere in Warsaw. The buildings surrounding the yard were quite old, like from pre-war Poland. Moreover, on the right there was a retro-style signboard, where blue letters were on a white background: “Pralnia” (“Laundry”). Suddenly, Józef Piłsudski, in his typical military coat and with his characteristic moustache, went out through the door in front of me, and walked down from the entresol. “This is not the best place”—he spoke to me.—“Surely you must have read it in my diary...”—he added, suggesting that I knew why the place was not “the best.” And then he started to tell me something about the current politics of European Union. I remember I was listening to him rather than participating in a discussion.

The night before the real presidential election in Poland, in the dream from 4<sup>th</sup> July 2010, I was in a prison together with Józef Piłsudski, who was my only co-prisoner in a cell. Leaning on a windowsill, through a very small window I saw that the sun was going down and the sky was turning dark blue. Suddenly I noticed that the window overlooked only tiny space just above the ground. That meant the cell was partly under the ground. I was scared by that limited access to the outside world, all the more so because I and Piłsudski had not yet got any dinner. Then I asked Piłsudski: “Could you read something for me from

---

<sup>47</sup> H. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., p. 138.

the newspapers?" He had newspapers upon his knees and, as he was viewing and shuffling them, I recognized the characteristic retro headlines of pre-war newspapers. And Piłsudski started to read loudly some press articles for me. The reading was calming me down.

### **Arendt's "Dreaming Philosophy" and the Main Themes of the Rest of Her Philosophy**

Understanding Arendt's concept of the political as the concept—which I would describe as the-political-as-recapturing-dreamy-harmony—solves, in a twofold way, the problem of Arendt's sharp distinction between public and private realms. In addition, these two interpretations I propose—which can be complementary—also reflect the question (which I tried to address in my earlier investigations<sup>48</sup>) about whether Arendt is a conservative supporter of "transcending one's needs" or rather a philosopher of imagination and creative individualism?<sup>49</sup> According to the first interpretation, dreams, owing to their symbolic nature, always integrate public and private matters. Our mind produces dreams independently of our planning, we never know what we will dream about, even if one can suppose likely content (if recently the magpie killed my canary, then it would be very probable that I would have nightmares about this event). As independent of our planning, the dreaming harmony between public and private realms is itself, even if full of our interests, "transcendent," coherent, spontaneous, and not "corrupted" by our non-ideal daily thinking and by exaggerated mode of calculative economic thinking. Taking into consideration that "economic thinking" is sometimes not bad, but sometimes really can be

---

<sup>48</sup> Cf. A. Czepiel, *Szczęśliwy człowiek kontra dobry obywatel? Zmagania z myślą Hanny Arendt (Happy Self vs. Good Citizen? A Struggle with Hannah Arendt's Thought)*, Warszawa 2017.

<sup>49</sup> This problem can be reflected by the fact that in the chapter *The Public Realm: The Common in The Human Condition* Arendt gives two definitions of the public sphere. The mentioned chapter gives us some "clearance" (Heideggerian "die Lichtung") that justifies the suspicion that two ways of understanding the public action, free speech, individual needs etc. can appear even inside the same text by Arendt because the philosopher sympathised with both ways of understanding. Referring to these two definitions, we can say that sometimes Arendt affirms freedom and public action as "free speech," "communicating our judgments and feelings," "spontaneous action"—i. e. the way that allows the integration of personal and political matters—and sometimes she understands freedom as, so to speak, "silencing our subjective private needs while being in public." However, it seems to be even more complicated because the individual will to be "proud" allows, in my opinion, to integrate the personal and the political, but Arendt qualifies it—with clearly non-conservative affirmation—as a part of the second (we may say "anti-subjectivist", conservative) definition of the public.

exaggerated, the interpretation above is a good, dream-affirming outcome of a rather disturbing fact that, quite pessimistically and conservatively, Arendt criticized the appearance of self-interest, including economic welfare, in political world; she believed it can easily transform itself into a “public struggle for private things.”<sup>50</sup> She also feared that the public appearance of economic interest could risk replacing the unpredictability of human action by a list of statistical behaviours<sup>51</sup> (however, another aspect of this view is her promotion of nonconformism, which is quite a romantic idea; but—and this question can sum up also my book about Arendt from 2017—why could not the way we speak about socioeconomic matters disclose our uniqueness and nonconformism?). Moreover, even if there is not a question of “corruption of public realm with private interests,” there can be the “risk” of non-perfect compromise between public and private domains: one might exaggerate both of them, or, at least if we “have” to put something private in politics, we could choose a wrong private thing, and so on. In other words, I can put it that way: for Hannah Arendt, if dream life was true life, a sharp public-private distinction would not be needed, as in James Madison’s words, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.”<sup>52</sup>

In *The Human Condition* Arendt claims that technical thinking can finally change the world into a “dream produced by man”: “This mathematically preconceived world may be a dream world where every dreamed vision a man himself produces has the character of reality only as long as the dream lasts.”<sup>53</sup> I think it is not a critique of a dreamlike world itself. What may be disadvantageous to Arendt is the fact that the dreams would not be a surprise, but they would technically be created by people. Because in dreams our wishes sometimes come true, we can point out that the conservative postulate of the defence of civilisation through openness to the transcendent or, as Stawrowski calls it, to the “unpredictable-yet-not-accidental”<sup>54</sup>—if only we treat dreams as

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, pp. 42–43.

<sup>52</sup> J. Madison, *The Federalist Paper No. 51: The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments*, [online] <https://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm> [accessed: 22.07.2019].

<sup>53</sup> H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>54</sup> Z. Stawrowski, *Świat zadowolonych głupców (The World of Content Fools)*, “Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus”, interviewed by M. Płociński, 6–7.07.2015. Other examples of conservative thinking—or at least of what I mean when I write about “conservatives”—are: Ch. Delsol, *La haine du monde. Totalitarismes et postmodernité*, Paris 2016, and R. Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy. Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*, New York 2016. The fact that I criticize conservatives does not mean that I support everything that is deemed “non-conservative” (for example infidelity to one’s life partner or hatred towards patriotism and religion).

transcendent!—has the potential of happiness and not only of, so to speak, "suffering for the sake of Kantian moral law." In other words, the openness to transcendence can bring not only the idea of self-accusation of sin but also the idea of praying to God for personal happiness, for example for a chance to be with the beloved one. Moreover, Arendt's critique of technology is not at all that conservative because technical thinking, introspection that is divided from reality, is based—according to Arendt—on individual's abandoning of five senses, while conservatives would rather speak about downfall consisting in "seeking for what is sensual" and the "egoistic" hope that an individual's good dreams will be fulfilled in our waking, sensual reality. Dreams, we might say, are not mere introspection that was criticised by mature Arendt in *The Human Condition*: the sensations we experience in dreams—joy, pain, surprise caused by events we see in dreams or things we hear about others' dreams—are often even more vivid than in waking life, and after waking up we remember them as vivid (as in Arendt's poem from 1951: "The multi-colored layers in my sleep / Which fear the precipitous void of our world"<sup>55</sup>). Some dreams, though recognized as unreal, are remembered by us as our most important memories are.

According to the second interpretation, we have to accentuate—contrary to *Die Schatten*, a self-analysis written by young Arendt—mature Arendt's aforementioned aversion towards memories and introspection. Biographers notice that she did not say much about her childhood, youth, and emotional life even to her closest friends. Arendt's personal memories and emotional states are, I think, rarely described in the correspondence with her husband Heinrich Blücher.<sup>56</sup> Commenting on Arendt's friendship with Mary McCarthy, Kathleen B. Jones observes that "Arendt's brutally honest mentoring of McCarthy in matters of the heart seemed to be a barrier behind which she kept her most self-revelatory feelings and fears to herself. Even though she talked with McCarthy about her concerns about Blücher's health and her feelings for her former lover, the notorious Martin Heidegger, Arendt didn't speak in the voice or with the vulnerability any woman, no matter how intellectual, might use to express her most intimate fears or joys with her 'closest woman friend.'"<sup>57</sup> Although

---

My critique of conservative thinking consists in the fact that the opinion that "my wishes, though I wish happiness, are also ethical" is suspicious for conservatives. The titles of the mentioned works show themselves that it does not take much to be called "the killer of civilization" by a conservative thinker.

<sup>55</sup> E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, H. Blücher, *Briefe 1936–1968*, ed. L. Kohler, München 1996. The letter from August 1945 (p. 137), where Arendt talks about her constant struggle to hide her fears, is one of the exceptions.

<sup>57</sup> K. B. Jones, *Hannah Arendt's Female Friends*, "LA Review of Books", 12.12.2013, [online] <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hannah-arendts-female-friends/> [accessed: 8.07.2019].

Jones finds that Arendt's friendship with Hilde Fränkel was more intimate, I think her letter to Fränkel from 10<sup>th</sup> February 1950,<sup>58</sup> where Arendt is describing her reunion with Heidegger during her first post-war visit to Europe, is rather joking and ironic, avoiding any description of internal emotional life, despite the fact that after the meeting Arendt wrote to Heidegger himself that their reunion was for her "a confirmation of a whole lifetime."<sup>59</sup> A similar observation is made by Young-Bruehl, who writes that "Arendt's opposition to introspection was politically understandable and fruitful, but it also provided justification for her distance from her own family memories, her own painful childhood and legacy of shyness, moodiness, impatience, and incommunicativeness"<sup>60</sup>—observes Young-Bruehl.

Hence, we may expect, the rigid public-private distinction in Arendt's thought. However, this distinction is not limitless: let us return here to the fact that Arendt, while criticising personal motivations of political activity, claims in *The Human Condition* that politics is about disclosing uniqueness of every acting person. And what would the "uniqueness" even be, if it was not about our personal – both emotional and socioeconomic—problems and interests? Here comes Arendt with her views that the political activity must consist in "communicability" of our opinions and feelings;<sup>61</sup> the political realm must be about individual's "telling one's story"<sup>62</sup> in an objectified way that is understandable to others. The experience of perfect dreamlike harmony—affirmed by Arendt, as I tried to show, throughout her life—is the answer that solves the problem of contradiction between Hannah Arendt's idea of expressing one's "uniqueness" in the political realm and her aversion towards the presence of private and intimate matters in public. The expressing of uniqueness seems to consist in the idea of the symbolic reality of a dream, where an individual is present in his or her uniqueness without reporting his or her private life in detail, because—by means of the specific, strange dreamlike harmony—all is "known" to others, the world symbolises problems and concerns of mine and others. Our private concerns—as young Arendt wrote—"merge" with all other concerns, so that public deeds voluntarily symbolise private problems and even solve them, and *vice versa* (we may think again of the above-mentioned dreams about Piłsudski). Although in the waking life it is impossible to perfectly recapture this in-

---

<sup>58</sup> H. Arendt, *Wie ich einmal ohne Dich leben soll, mag ich mir nicht vorstellen: Briefwechsel mit den Freundinnen Charlotte Beradt, Rose Feitelson, Hilde Fränkel, Anne Weil-Mendelsohn und Helen Wolff*, Hrsg. U. Ludz, I. Nordmann, München 2017.

<sup>59</sup> As quoted in: S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, London 2003, p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 72–77.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 175.



voluntarily, spontaneous condition of dream life, coming closer and closer to this ideal might be a good idea about political life; about public debate. Biographically speaking, Arendt's psychological strict unwillingness towards talking publicly about personal problems is confronted with her deep conviction that our personal history really counts in meta-political thinking, and Arendt's "dream about dreamlife of politics" was perhaps based on the fact that, although, she does not speak in public, and even to her friends, about her private life, her dreams do this for her: Arendt was relieved of telling directly about her personal life in public and in her philosophical texts, and at the same time dreams were making her realise that personal story is important in philosophy and politics, and she was telling her story in a dreamlike way—metaphorically and indirectly—in her philosophical books (an example is the presence of Augustinian phrase "amo: volo ut sis" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: these words are strictly linked to Arendt's youthful love relationship.) Hence—perhaps—the idea described in *The Human Condition* that true political life consists in "telling one's story" in the way that a person's "daimon"—his or her emotional and spiritual life, imagination and private motivations—is involuntarily "visible" and interplays with the political every time when a person tells in public his or her "true opinion" (term from *On Revolution*<sup>63</sup>). And, because Arendt herself writes that we feel "urge towards disclosure,"<sup>64</sup> the disclosing person—we can know it from our experience of public discussions—knows she discloses also her "daimon," even if she, unlike in the dream, does not sum it up or even is incapable of summing it up. Then dreams, as a role model, inspire this person how to act to express the "daimon."

Based on two interpretations presented above, another observation is worthy of attention. Dreams involve spontaneous integration of our different problems and thoughts, including public and private concerns. They might not always do so by establishing peace between them, but simply by displaying them in our head like a film and thus being a phenomenon of "appearance" which was important for Arendt's idea of *vita activa*. Dreams, we might say, due to their symbolic character integrate *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* without the duty of finding a strict, proper limit between public and private, from which, like from the door, we might fly out into the public world; the door that Arendt sometimes conservatively closes, as when she criticises caring of ourselves by means of politics („[it is a] curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance"<sup>65</sup>) or where she says that "thinking [...] has

---

<sup>63</sup> Eadem, *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>64</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 35.

no political relevance unless special emergencies arise.”<sup>66</sup> Instead, dream itself is flying out. For Arendt, who sometimes joyfully flies out by stressing only the aspect of courageous making our name known through presenting our unique imagination in discussion, instead of sticking to her concept of a strict border between public and private, dreams would really be a harmonious place to realise *vita activa* (“An ‘enlightened,’ in fact rather mechanical, opposition of reason and passion does not enlighten us very much on the great subject of the human capabilities,”<sup>67</sup> Arendt wrote.)

### Daily and Dreamy Romanticism

In our waking thoughts we consider and try to link different interests and wishes, the personal and political, and different interpretations of the same situation. This complicatedness is often too hard to sum up in one phrase, and it is also dependent on external events and moods (described by romantic poets and Heidegger) in which some expectations and thoughts seem more important than others. In Mickiewicz’s *Forefathers’ Eve* Konrad’s proud improvisation and priest Piotr’s humble praying reflect, as I think, two sides of a human being, or rather—of human condition. These poetic situations indicate that there is always hope that the one who fears she is not right would win at the end. The force of dreams, one might say, consists in integrating and explaining this complexity, involuntarily creating “one mood” made of our daily moods (which, of course, are not our “untrue selves,” but are important for cognition).

Even though Arendt, in her book on Varnhagen, tends to ironise the romantic sacralisation of “the boundlessness of the Mood,”<sup>68</sup> claiming that it was “magic” rather than real, the very words she uses to seemingly ironise romanticism present her vision of the political realm: “Playing with possibilities engendered the ‘Romantic confusion’ which canceled the isolation of the Schleiermacherian individual that for a moment it seemed as if reality might invade the scene after all by sheer chance, by a surprise attack. But this would have to be pure extraordinariness, a miracle [...] Expectation of the extraordinary never lets reality have its say, so to speak.”<sup>69</sup> Arendt herself described human action as “unexpected” and “spontaneous,” mainly the political action,<sup>70</sup> the situation,

---

<sup>66</sup> Eadem, *The Life of the Mind*, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>67</sup> Eadem, *On Revolution*, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>68</sup> Eadem, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 60–61.

<sup>70</sup> However, in *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt claims that spontaneity can also be a characteristic of the private realm. In my opinion, this view saves Arendt’s philosophy from the interpretation that our private life cannot be based on spontaneous acts.

which I would characterise as I-have-to-speak-out-my-unique-opinion" (in my view this is also, to be honest, an act of caring about myself). In *The Human Condition* she claims: "The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique."<sup>71</sup> Hannah Arendt's irony of romantic "boundlessness of the Mood"<sup>72</sup> ends up in praising political spontaneous action as "boundless,"<sup>73</sup> and that makes me think even stronger that spontaneity was for Arendt a kind of mood in which we enter into public debate. Arendt's critical, but undeniable fascination with romanticism from the time of writing the book on Rahel continues in *The Human Condition*.

Because Arendt affirms—as a central point of her concept of political realm—waiting for unexpected, doing unexpected, and imagining the unexpected, in this light the words from Varnhagen book: "In expecting a miracle that does not arrive, the imagination conjures up 'the most interesting situations'"<sup>74</sup> become less ironic. Even if some situations would not occur, imagination—daily as well as dreamy—would be politically important, it will show what should happen, what we should do, and what we would gain or lose if a specific scenario happens. It seems that according to Arendt the romantic, expecting, and hopeful "boundlessness of the Mood" is good as long as the mood is natural and it is not artificially "conjuring up future moods which convert all reality into the neutralized 'it has already happened.'"<sup>75</sup> This notion provokes us to guess that Arendt's critique of romanticism is rather a critique of artificialisation of romanticism, when romanticism is no longer about personal authenticity and becomes "fashion." For example, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* anything could be "romanticized"—"people, state, family, nobility"—if only "paying patron asked for it."<sup>76</sup> Even in the case when romanticism is honest, Arendt does rather not believe that a "romanticization" of something can survive longer than a "moment's notice." But her quite romantic (emotionally-based) concepts are different: her "constitutive longing" from the 1925 essay *Die Schatten*, as well as mature concept of public happiness we may recollect after a political event—these are stable yet romantic moods.

---

<sup>71</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>72</sup> Eadem, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Eadem, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>74</sup> Eadem, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> Eadem, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., pp. 165–170.

Arendt herself—maybe as a supporter of true romanticism—seems to appreciate Rahel for her being a romantic hero, for acting out from her genuine immediate feeling, for her ability to disclose her mood: “She was able to play the part demanded by the moment. She could work her magic upon all who came to her; she was able to handle the miscellaneous personalities of her salon; she was in her element when she was able to play so upon her circle that each person said exactly what was most brilliant at the particular moment. Never again was she as effective as she was during this period; never again did she wield such power over people; never again did she impress people as so entirely herself in all her uniqueness. [...] In ‘romantic confusion’ there lay a chance to permit reality to break in”<sup>77</sup>—writes Arendt in her early book, and we have to remember that biographers agree that Hannah Arendt, writing a book and minor texts on Rahel Varnhagen, treated Rahel as her alter ego<sup>78</sup>). What was for Arendt a model of the public sphere was a romantic salon, in which our dreamy harmonious uniqueness together with map of problems and wishes—as Rahel’s identity-seeking—was transposed to real life at a greater level than in modern political life (as Arendt wrote, dreams represented Rahel’s problems with entering the common world<sup>79</sup> and “were the continuation of the day”<sup>80</sup>). In her text from 1933, 27-year-old Arendt reveals that salons were something like the political realm on private estates, consisting in direct debate, “self-presentation” of citizens instead of “representation”<sup>81</sup> (as we can see, Arendt links romanticism with direct democracy). Hence, we may suppose how Arendt’s later idea of the political arises, namely we have to create a political realm as the common world of appearance and free speech, a big romantic salon. Without this sphere—which at the same time would in some way recapture dreamlike harmony and symbolism—the world is a void, as Arendt claims in one of her poems written in 1951: “The multi-colored layers in my sleep / Which fear the precipitous void of our world.”<sup>82</sup> As Arendt writes about Varnhagen’s dreams, “Rahel always found herself in a world more distinguished than the one in which she belonged”—and politically we can understand this as

---

<sup>77</sup> Eadem, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., pp. 62–63.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. S. Benhabib, op. cit., pp. 1–22. Seyla Benhabib claims that: “In telling Rahel Varnhagen’s story, Arendt was engaging in a process of self-understanding and self-redefinition as a German Jew” (ibidem, p. 8).

<sup>79</sup> H. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen...*, op. cit., p. 137

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem, p. 138.

<sup>81</sup> Eadem, *Original Assimilation. An Epilogue to the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rahel Varnhagen’s Death*, [in] eadem, *Jewish Writings*, eds. J. Kohn and R. H. Feldman, New York 2007, p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 90.

a hint that our goal, at least if we agree with Arendt's diagnoses, is to have the political sphere of plurality, in which everyone can present their complex views, as opposed to simplified modern representative democracy (or rather, I would say, quasi-democracy).

Arendt's claim that the political "telling one's story"<sup>83</sup> should be in some way "telling one's dreams" and living according to dreamlike harmony, is reflected in her—rather unknown before<sup>84</sup>—youthful notes on the edition of Sophocles's tragedies from 1924, which were published by Bard College in April 2016<sup>85</sup> and which I tried to decipher. There are four hints that inform us that Arendt might have taken these notes somewhere between 1926–1928 and that the book must have been part of Arendt's pre-war book collection that survived the World War Two in Paris and was retrieved by Arendt after the war.<sup>86</sup> Firstly, at the end of the book we can see a bookstore sticker: "Eugen Hütter Heidelberg Ludwigsplatz 12." The "Ludwigsplatz" in Heidelberg in 1928 changed its name to "Universitätsplatz." Secondly, there are no English marginalia of the first three plays (*Ajax*, *Elektra*, *King Oedipus*) as if the mature philosopher would not have wanted to disturb her notes from the youth because of sentiment. Thirdly, the handwriting of the majority of annotations on the first three plays – including the annotations I will analyse below—is different from English annotations in later parts of the book: they resemble Arendt's handwriting from her letters to Erwin Loewenson from 1927–1928.<sup>87</sup> The German notes are more sloppy and less legible than English ones—we can compare the latter with the English words "seat" and "sudden striking" written next to lines 185–195 of *Agamemnon*. Fourthly, a lot of German marginalia look like studying the construction of ancient Greek tragedy—a thing that would not rather be interesting for a mature philosopher.

---

<sup>83</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, op. cit., pp. 175–193.

<sup>84</sup> I have found only one article which takes into consideration Arendt's notes on this edition of Sophocles: S. Zappulla, *Reading Antigone through Hannah Arendt's Political Philosophy*, [in:] "Art, Emotion and Value. 5<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Congress of Aesthetics", Cartagena 2011, pp. 111–138. However, as the title suggests, the text does not adopt Arendt's notes on *Elektra*. The author analyses a few notes made on *Antigone*.

<sup>85</sup> Sophoclis, *Fabulae*, [online] <http://www.bard.edu/library/arendt/pdfs/Sophoclis-Fabulae.pdf> [accessed: 18.05.2019]. This is Arendt's copy of: *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Oxonii (Oxford) 1924. Four annotations on *Elektra*, which are analysed by me in this article, are on the following pages of the PDF document: 38, 39, and 42.

<sup>86</sup> I am thankful to Ursula Ludz, the editor of Arendt's correspondence, for the information about the preservation of the collection of Hannah Arendt's pre-war books.

<sup>87</sup> I have copies of these letters from Deutsche Literaturarchiv in Marbach, so I was able to compare them with the marginalia on Sophocles.

In Arendt's book on Sophocles's plays, around lines 410–430 of *Elektra*, there is a scene when one of the characters of the tragedy, Chrysothemis, says that she had seen her mother Klytaemestra telling her dream to Helios (the Sun God in ancient Greece). Arendt comments on that next to the line 424, underlining the word "Helios" (Ἥλιος in dative): "Helios rückt die Träume aus d.[em] Nachlaß"—which means: "Helios is withdrawing the dreams from the archive/heritage." Through this quote, Arendt, probably as an about 20-year-old person, presents a view that "Helios"—some external spiritual force or internal belief, or maybe the mix of the two—has the power to make people disclose their dreams. I think that a connotation to Arendt's later concept of "telling one's story" as having political significance is justifiable, all the more so because the complex, messy and irrational reality of the dream, just like one's feeling-and-reason-based judgment before telling it publicly, must be made "communicable"<sup>88</sup> (in some way "deindividualised") when one wants to say it to someone or just write it down. And even if in *Elektra* Klytaemestra does not reveal her dream properly "in the public," in the agora, but tells it quite privately to a god, the simple fact of speaking out the dream has a political significance that young Arendt also must have noticed: as we know, Klytaemestra is the queen of Mycenae, and her dream was about the remorse she had after killing her husband, king Agamemnon, in order to live with her lover Aegisthus. The dream, as recounted by the dreamer, was heard by a friend of princess Chrysothemis who later told her about it, and then Chrysothemis told the mother's dream to her sister Elektra, provoking her and her brother Orestes to take revenge on their father. There is a question whether Arendt meant "Nachlass" to be "archive" or "heritage." In the first case, we can interpret the comment as if Helios would force Klytaemestra to take the dream out of her archive, a "wardrobe" of her mind. But if Arendt meant heritage—things a family inherit after someone's death—it could have meant that, according to the thinker, in Sophocles' play Helios forced Klytaemestra to reveal the dream that had been originally coming from the "heritage" of Agamemnon—namely, Agamemnon himself "sent" the dream to Klytaemestra after his death to inform the murderers about the possibility of revenge.

It is necessary to quote the content of Klytaemestra's dream, as told by Chrysothemis to Elektra around line 420 of the tragedy: "The dream said that she [Klytaemestra] saw our father [Agamemnon] as if he were here in the light of this world and as her husband again; and he took his sceptre from Aegisthus' hand and planted it hard next to the hearth. Immediately after that the sceptre shot out a branch whose blossoms covered the whole of Mycenae."<sup>89</sup> Later, in

---

<sup>88</sup> Cf. H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 72-77.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem.

lines 630–660, Klytaemestra refers to this dream (and to a second, unknown dream) in her prayer to another god, Phoebos Apollo. The queen's praying is as follows: "Two dreams, both of nightmares here and there, my Lord. Lord Phoebos, if they are to come to some good, help them come to fruition but if they are to result in awful deeds, then let these deeds fall upon my enemies' heads. And Lord, let no one conspire with others or plot against me to rob me of my livelihood, the wealth of the Atridae. Let me live, Phoebos this good life, the serene life as keeper of this royal sceptre."<sup>90</sup> We clearly see that Klytaemestra has already known that Elektra and Orestes want to kill her and Aegisthus in revenge, but this time she is full of self-conviction and she wants primarily to preserve her political and symbolic power of the queen. Yet Klytaemestra's dreams make her unsure about her victory. Her dreams forecast either good or evil outcome. Next to Klytaemestra's prayer to Apollo there is a comment by Hannah Arendt: "die Doppeldeutig.[keit] d.[es] Traumes! (Als bei Sop.[hocles] am mind.[estens]) ist diesem Gold d.[er] Klyt.[aemestra] zur Liebe erforder.[liche]"—which translates as: "the ambiguity of the dream! (as in Sophocles at least) is this treasure of Klytaemestra that is necessary for her to love."<sup>91</sup> In her comment, young Arendt refers to the play between good and bad forecasts from the dream, to the phenomenon of uncertainty, which later would become important for her concept of politics. Moreover, it is very probable that Arendt also refers to the specific dream of Klytaemestra told by Chrysothemis, because earlier, next to the lines 418–425 (where there is a description of a dream that "[Agamemnon] took his sceptre from Aegisthus' hand and planted it hard next to the hearth. Immediately [...] blossoms covered the whole of Mycenae") Arendt similarly noted the ambiguity: "Zweideutigk.[eit] d.[es] Traumes! B.[ei] Herd ist, als demonstriert, nur Zweid.[eutigkeit]"—which can be translated as: "Ambiguity of the dream! At hearth there is, as it was demonstrated, only ambiguity." In both comments by Arendt, an emotion concerning the ambiguity of dreams is visible (maybe also because "Zweideutigkeit"—"ambiguity"—is one of important terms of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, in which young Arendt found a language to describe her own self and, at the same time, as Arendt-Heidegger correspondence and Hans Jonas's memories suggests,<sup>92</sup> in her youth she might have been questioning Heidegger's strict understanding of the ambiguity as an "improper self").

---

<sup>90</sup> I quote George Theodoridis's English translation of Sophocles's *Elektra*: <https://bachicstage.wordpress.com/sophocles/elektra/> [accessed: 2.07.2019].

<sup>91</sup> At the end of Arendt's comment, after the word "erforder[liche]," there is also the letter "K."—however, it is impossible to guess what it could have meant.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Heidegger's letters to Arendt from 24<sup>th</sup> April 1925 and 1<sup>st</sup> May 1925. In the letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> April, Heidegger partly criticized Arendt's *Die Schatten*. In the letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> May,

In her comments, Arendt seems to see that the ambiguity of the dream can bring a hope for Klytaemestra, but not in the sense that the murderer will avoid remorse and a form of punishment, but in the sense that—as in the recounted dream there is no bloody revenge, but beautiful blossoms growing after Agamemnon rightly takes the royal sceptre from Aegisthus—if Klytaemestra understood that Aegisthus should not be the king, and believed that the goodness and fruitfulness of the kingdom would arise only out of Agamemnon's deeds and political wisdom, then Klytaemestra would learn to love properly—she would learn to love her children, the kingdom, and the memory of Agamemnon. This interpretation corresponds with Arendt's theological doctoral dissertation on love in the thought of Saint Augustine. Of course we know that at the end of the tragedy Klytaemestra does not regret anything and, together with Aegisthus, is killed by Orestes; however, independently of the ending of the tragedy, Arendt's interpretation of the dream is a romantic practice of seeking hope and “gleam of righteousness”<sup>93</sup> in everything and everyone. Another note written by Arendt on *Elektra* seems to sum up her philosophical attitude to dreams and their worldly significance: next to the lines 500–502, when the Choir sings about Klytaemestra's dream: “If the prophesy in this dire dream is not fulfilled then let us say it: / Prophecies and oracles do not exist in dreams,” Arendt notes:<sup>94</sup> “Leere im Schlagen auf d.[en] Traum”—which translates more or less as: “[There is] emptiness in beating the dream.”

---

he seemingly accounted her emotional reaction to this critique: Hannah had a “frozen soul” (“frierende Seele”). It is probable that she might have felt disenchanting with her understanding of the self, although using Heideggerian terms, turned out to clash with Heidegger's own thinking and was deemed wrong by him. Cf. H. Arendt, M. Heidegger, *Briefe 1925 bis 1975...*, op. cit., pp. 26–28. Hans Jonas, who befriended Hannah Arendt during their student years in Marburg, confirms Arendt's partly polemical approach towards Heidegger during that time. Jonas notes that despite the common atmosphere of students' worship of Heidegger's philosophy, Arendt, even as Heidegger's lover, preserved her “skepticism” which enabled her to critically examine Heidegger's concept. Cf. H. Jonas, *Memoirs*, ed. Ch. Wiese, trans. K. Winston, London 2008, p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> Term from Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*.

<sup>94</sup> Among four annotations analysed in this article, this one was the most difficult to decipher, thus it poses the greatest risk of wrong deciphering.



## Conclusion

Both in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>95</sup> and *The Life of the Mind*<sup>96</sup> Arendt argues that worldly realm of human speeches and deeds consists in the fact that entering into a debate with others ends internal doubts of an individual: we have to speak as one person, and even if someone discloses publicly his or her doubts, these spoken doubts appear as part of harmonious "one person"; in this situation our doubts, concerns and wishes harmonise and thus we interact with the world, although in the dream, according to Arendt's reflections on Rahel Varnhagen, this harmony is greater: it makes our vision and understanding of ourselves and of the world "sharper" and "clearer" than in the waking reality. This fact sheds light on the relation between a dream world and the political realm understood by Arendt as "lawful space of worldly appearance:"<sup>97</sup> in a dream we act directly out of our internal wishes and doubts, which harmonise with the world and are symbolised in our interactions with other people. With Arendt, who even in 1925 expressed her wish to have space for a free speech where her soul could come closer to the internal and worldly harmony experienced by her while dreaming, it turns out that the task of politics is to recapture the condition of a dream. Of course, the interpretation that the political sphere as coming close to dreamlike human condition does not explain everything in Arendt's concept of the political. However, as everyone dreams and everyone sometimes thinks about politics (even in the form of a simple question: Why should I vote?), the interpretation I proposed in the present article can be informative not only with regard to Arendt's quite complicated thought, but also with regard to the matter of what the truth is and what the world is.

It is important to stress that Hannah Arendt did not use to write down her own dreams. We have only two descriptions of her dreams: first, the biographer tells the youthful (around 1928) nightmare about death of a professor from Heidelberg<sup>98</sup> (I guess it might have been Karl Jaspers); second, in 1970s in her philosophical diary Arendt wrote down her dream about talking with Kurt Blumenfeld, one of Arendt's close friends, who died in 1963.<sup>99</sup> Maybe it is true

---

<sup>95</sup> H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, op. cit., p. 476.

<sup>96</sup> Eadem, *The Life of the Mind*, op. cit., pp. 179–193 (chapter *The two-in-one*).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. P. Birmingham, *Heidegger and Arendt: The Lawful Space of Worldly Appearance*, [in:] *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, eds. F. Raffoul and E. S. Nelson, London–New Delhi–New York 2013, pp. 157–163.

<sup>98</sup> E. Young-Bruehl, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>99</sup> H. Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, vol. 2, Hrsg. U. Ludz, I. Nordmann, München 2003, p. 701.

that Arendt's striving for political realm was in fact a disclosure of her lifelong dreams about having a homely realm where her personality would be spoken out.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Arendt H., *Civil Disobedience*, [in:] *Crises of the Republic*, San Diego–New York–London 1972.
2. Arendt H., *Denktagebuch*, vol. 2, Hrsg. U. Ludz, I. Nordmann, München 2003.
3. Arendt H., *The Human Condition*, Chicago 2019.
4. Arendt H., *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Chicago 1992.
5. Arendt H., *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego–New York–London 1981.
6. Arendt H., *Lying in Politics*, [in:] *Crises of the Republic*, San Diego–New York–London 1972.
7. Arendt H., *On Revolution*, London 1990.
8. Arendt H., *Original assimilation. An Epilogue to the One Hundredth Anniversary of Rahel Varnhagen's Death*, [in:] *Jewish Writings*, eds. J. Kohn and R. H. Feldman, New York 2007.
9. Arendt H., *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Orlando–New York 1979.
10. Arendt H., *Rahel Varnhagen. The Life of a Jewish Woman*, New York–London 1974.
11. Arendt H., *Wie ich einmal ohne Dich leben soll, mag ich mir nicht vorstellen: Briefwechsel mit den Freundinnen Charlotte Beradt, Rose Feitelson, Hilde Fränkel, Anne Weil-Mendelsohn und Helen Wolff*, Hrsg. U. Ludz, I. Nordmann, München 2017.
12. Arendt H., Blücher H., *Briefe 1936–1968*, ed. L. Kohler, München 1996.
13. Arendt H., Heidegger M., *Briefe 1925 bis 1975 und andere Zeugnisse*, ed. U. Ludz, Frankfurt am Main 2013.
14. Arendt H., Heidegger M., *Letters 1925–1975*, trans. A. Shields, Harcourt, London 2004.
15. Benhabib S., *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, London 2003.
16. Birmingham P., *Heidegger and Arendt: The Lawful Space of Worldly Appearance*, [in:] *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, eds. F. Raffoul and E. S. Nelson, London–New Delhi–New York 2013.
17. Czepiel A., *Szczęśliwy człowiek kontra dobry obywatel? Zmagania z myślą Hanny Arendt (Happy Self vs. Good Citizen? A Struggle with Hannah Arendt's Thought)*, Warszawa 2017.
18. Delsol Ch., *La haine du monde. Totalitarismes et postmodernité*, Paris 2016.
19. Hegel G. W. F., *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1984.
20. Heidegger M., *Sein und Zeit* (Gesamtausgabe vol. 2), Frankfurt am Main 1977.
21. Heuer W., 'Imagination is the Prerequisite of Understanding' (Arendt). *The Bridge between Thinking and Judging*, [in:] *Hannah Arendt: Filosofia e Totalitarismo*, eds. F. Fiscetti, F. R. Recchia Luciani, Genoa 2007, [online] [http://www.wolfgang-heuer.com/wp-content/uploads/heuer\\_wolfgang\\_imagination\\_bari.pdf](http://www.wolfgang-heuer.com/wp-content/uploads/heuer_wolfgang_imagination_bari.pdf) [accessed: 15.06.2019].
22. Jonas H., *Memoirs*, ed. Ch. Wiese, trans. K. Winston, London 2008.
23. Jones K. B., *Hannah Arendt's Female Friends*, "LA Review of Books", 12.12.2013, [online] <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hannah-arendts-female-friends/> [accessed: 8.07.2019].

24. Janicki M., Władyka W., *Klątwa politycznego symetryzmu (The Fate of Political Symmetry Thinking)*, "Polityka" 3.05.2016.
25. Keats J., *Endymion: A Poetic Romance*, London 1818.
26. Legutko R., *The Demon in Democracy. Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*, New York 2016.
27. Madison J., *The Federalist Paper No. 51: The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances Between the Different Departments*, [online] <https://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm> [accessed: 22.07.2019].
28. Mickiewicz A., *Forefathers' Eve*, trans. G. Rapall Noyes, [in:] *Polish Romantic Drama*, ed. H. B. Segel, Amsterdam 1997.
29. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. B. Jowett, Rockville 2018.
30. Schneider J., *The Age of Romanticism*, Westport-London 2007.
31. Sophocles, *Elektra*, trans. G. Theodoridis, [online] <https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/sophocles/elektra/> [accessed: 2.07.2019].
32. Sophocles, *Sophoclis Fabulae*, Oxonii (Oxford) 1924, Hannah Arendt's annotated copy, available at: <http://www.bard.edu/library/arendt/pdfs/Sophoclis-Fabulae.pdf> [accessed: 18.05.2019].
33. Stawrowski Z., *Solidarność znaczy więź (Solidarity Means a Bond)*, Kraków 2010.
34. Stawrowski Z., *Świat zadowolonych głupców (The World of Content Fools)*, "Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus", interviewed by M. Płociński, 6-7.07.2015.
35. Young-Bruehl E., *Hannah Arendt: For the Love of the World*, New Haven-London 2004.

